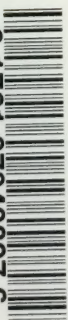


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Beautiful Switzerland  
**VILLARS**  
Champéry &c.



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VILLARS: THE GRAND AND THE PETIT MUVERAN

Beautiful Switzerland

# VILLARS

## AND ITS ENVIRONS.

*Painted and Described by*

G. FLEMWELL

*Author of "Lucerne" "Chamonix" "Lausanne"*  
*"Alpine Flowers and Gardens" &c.*



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# Beautiful Switzerland

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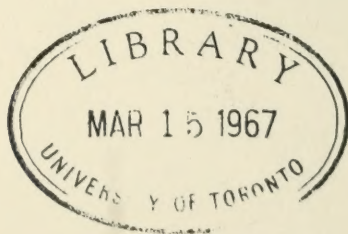
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LUCERNE | CHAMONIX  
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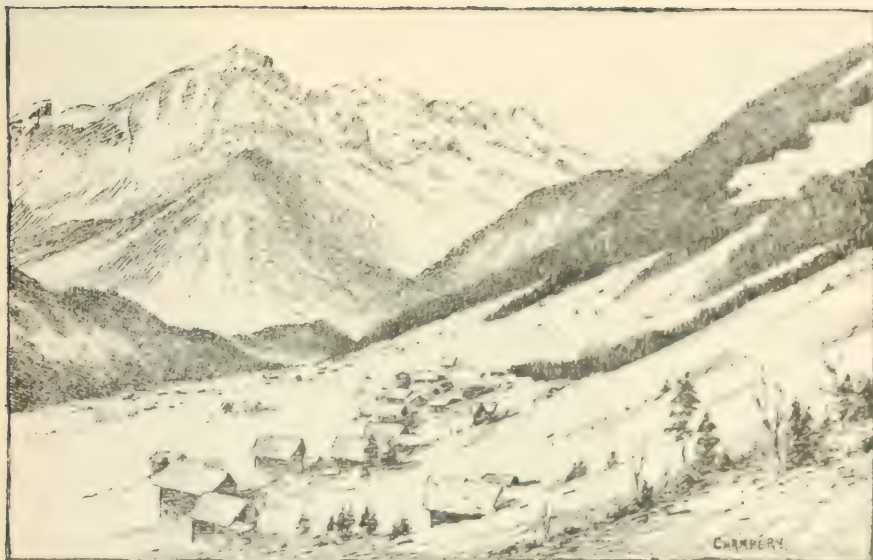


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## VILLARS AND ITS ENVIRONS

There is no more interesting district in the Rhone valley, perhaps even in the whole of Switzerland, than that which lies around the north-western entrance to the upper and main portion of the Canton of Valais—that impressive, narrow entrance formed by the buttress cliffs of the Dent de Morcles and the Dent du Midi, just inside of which nestles the ancient town of St. Maurice. For this district is compact of great variety. It holds examples of all that goes to

the making of Switzerland's fascination. It holds the fertile plain with its broad, rushing river, the Rhone; it holds, in Aigle and St. Maurice, two châteaured towns with long and active histories of their own; it holds, in Bex, one of the most delightful spots imaginable for spring and autumn; in Leysin, a world-known mountain health resort; popular mountain pleasure resorts in Villars, Chesières, Gryon, Les Plans, Champéry and Morgins; and, in the natives of the Val d'Illiez, it holds a distinctive race with a distinctive tongue. Moreover, it contains, in the huge erratic blocks near Monthey and near Bex, remarkable vestiges of the great glacier which one time filled this valley and flowed on over what is now Lac Léman;<sup>1</sup> it has noble peaks in number and of no mean order for the climber; it possesses at least three glaciers which, though small, are full of individual interest and beauty; and it harbours a flora so rich as to have become renowned. And yet all of this, and more besides, is packed within a comparatively restricted area. One reason for this great variety in so small a compass is the curiously striking fact of the Rhone dividing Vaud from Valais, and thus at the same time dividing to a marked extent what is wild and truly Alpine circumstance from what is relatively tame and rural. For Champéry, although

<sup>1</sup> See *Lausanne* in this series.



at some 650 feet lower altitude than Villars,<sup>1</sup> its *vis-à-vis* across the valley of the Rhone, partakes of the rude Alpine character of Valais, whilst Villars has what may be called the civilized setting so generally characteristic of Vaud. The difference may be noted in their respective vegetations—in the trees and flowers. For instance, at Champéry the bell-gentian (*Gentiana excisa*) and the yellow pea (*Lathyrus luteus*) can be found within a few minutes of the hotels, whereas at Villars one must walk at least an hour and a half higher up to find the gentian, and the pea I have not found there at all. Or again, Villars possesses fine deciduous trees in quantity and its pines are perfect park-like specimens; whilst at Champéry deciduous trees are inconspicuous and the pines are of the rugged Alpine order. Villars possesses the finer panorama—one of the finest in Switzerland, particularly in winter—but Champéry provides the truer Alpine pictures, especially in summer.

Indeed the very variety of this district—historically, geographically, botanically—sets a difficult task before so slight a volume as this present. However, an attempt must be made towards adequacy. No time can be wasted, and we had best start at St. Maurice and work diligently round in a circle by way of Bex, Les Plans, and Villars, thence to Aigle

<sup>1</sup> Champéry 1049 metres; Villars 1256 metres.

and Leysin, ending up with Monthey, Morgins, and Champéry, meanwhile knitting the whole district together with general and comparative facts.

## ST. MAURICE

The scene as one approaches St. Maurice from the north-west is among the most noted in Valais. The old castle hugging the cliff to the right and dominating the swift and troubled Rhone rushing low beneath the ancient stone bridge, with the great sheer Rock of Dailly to the left—it is a memorable picture, particularly in spring, when the wild wallflowers and laburnum deck the castle cliffs, and the young tints of spruce and larch soften the stern aspect of the fortress. Fortress? Yes, the Rock of Dailly, buttress of the Dent de Morcles, is a veritable Gibraltar, designed to stop and crush all invasion by way of the Simplon and the Grand St. Bernard. From an arrant civilian's standpoint it would seem an absolute impossibility for an invading army to live to pass the narrow defile of St. Maurice. Those innumerable and mighty guns hidden in the face of that grim precipice are apparently able to overwhelm all intruders, and the defile of St. Maurice would seem as safe to-day as when in olden times it was closed by a great gate. One has only to watch at nighttime the firing practice,



ST. MAURICE - THE CHATEAU AND THE ROCK-AD-DORRY





illuminated by searchlights and directed against the forests and cliffs high upon the Dent du Midi, to be impressed with the awful deadliness of this rock-fortress. It seems, of course, a sacrilege so to insult the lovely, peaceful Alps; it seems a gross, insensate outrage upon a land pre-eminently designed to wean men from the cult of war.<sup>1</sup> But of its practical effectiveness in case of need there can be no manner of doubt. Napoleon to-day would have to go round some other way to get to Italy; he could not now use Switzerland as a convenient passage. And yet, and yet, it seems to me a shame when I remember the delightful months I spent upon the summit of the Rock of Dailly some five-and-twenty years ago, and think that now it is closed to mere civilians, that the magnificent prospect, with a sheer drop down upon the Baths of Lavey, is now only examined by the trainer of far-reaching cannon, and that the exquisite carpet of Alpine flowers around the Dent de Morcles is trampled under foot by companies and battalions. It is sometimes hard to reconcile one's quiet ideals with the stern exigencies of life, and perhaps this is particularly so in Switzerland. It was on the slopes high above Dailly, now a vast manœuvre ground for troops, that I once fled hurriedly in the front of a stampeding herd of cattle driven mad

<sup>1</sup> See *Lucerne* in this series.

by flies, and that I only just escaped destruction by scrambling on to the roof of a friendly cheese chalet. Needless to say, I do not rank such incidents among my quiet ideals.<sup>1</sup>

St. Maurice can boast of as long a history as any town in the country. Looking backwards it is lost in the mists of Time, and it only reveals itself with real distinctness when the Romans made the town the centre of their activities in Valais, and Julius Cæsar threw up walls and fortifications around it and gave it the name of *Tarnade* or *Ager Tarnadensis*. The well-known savant and archæologist, Dean Bourban, of the Abbey of St. Maurice, says that the road which crosses the bridge and runs beside the Rhone, through the defile, through the town and on to Martigny and the Grand St. Bernard, is the selfsame road used by the Gauls on their way to Italy, and by the Romans on their way to Gaul and Germany. There is at Bourg St. Pierre, the last village on the road to the Grand St. Bernard, an ancient milestone, marking the twenty-fourth mile between Aosta and Martigny on the great military route which ran from Milan, through St. Maurice, to Mayence in Germany. On the front of the old town hall of St. Maurice is an inscription saying:

<sup>1</sup> This was at a time when the bulls were let out by day. Now there is restriction upon the liberty of these uneven-tempered animals.

"I am Christian since the year 58". According to tradition St. Peter crossed the Grand St. Bernard and preached Christianity throughout Valais, and if this be fact, then he must of necessity have been to St. Maurice. But the town's present name was not then in existence; it is derived from the massacre in 302 of the Theban Legion commanded by Maurice. The massacre is said to have occurred in what is now the Bois Noir, about two miles out along the road to Martigny—a wild sparse forest of stunted pines beneath which the lovely rosy springtime heather (*Erica carnea*) luxuriates. This forest was the scene, too, of the terrible rockfall in 1835 from the summit of the Dent du Midi, which mountain, in its grandest and most gaunt aspect, dominates this part of the valley, having as *vis-à-vis* the Dent de Morcles.<sup>1</sup> The old Abbey of St. Maurice, built upon pagan foundations, was for centuries a spoilt child of the Church. Endowments and gifts were showered upon it by Charlemagne and other kings and princes, and its actually existing treasure is priceless, including as it does specimens of gold and silversmiths' art from the sixth to the seventeenth centuries.\* High

<sup>1</sup> Geologists hold that in the remote past these two mountains were connected and formed a continuous chain.

\* Goethe, who visited St. Maurice with the Duke of Weimar in 1779, probably saw this treasure, as do most visitors, but his mind seems to have been greatly occupied by the bad state of the roads.



up on the side of the precipitous cliffs at the back of the abbey is an ancient hermitage. As one looks at it from the town there appears no sign of a path or even of a ledge for the chapel; but on closer inspection one finds a steep and stony way up, bordered at intervals throughout its length by Stations of the Cross. When I visited it some years ago the hermit was absent, but there were rats in abundance. Pilgrimages to this chapel used to be frequent (I believe that it is closed at present), and I understand that on these occasions freshly broken stone was strewn about the path, and that those who felt their consciences in need of drastic measures went up the whole way on their hands and knees.

Ten minutes' climb above the Château of St. Maurice (now the gendarmerie and prison) is the beautiful Fairies' Grotto, one of the natural wonders of this district. It is noted locally as having been the residence of Frisette, the good fairy, after her troubles and vexations with the bad fairy, Turlure, who, if my memory serves me, frequented the woods and pastures around Bex. The Canton of Valais is remarkably rich in legend. If we accept the result of the patient and exhaustive researches of Mme F. Byse, Milton must have made himself familiar with certain of these fairy tales when he was at Bex on his way from Italy; for *L'Allegro* is held to contain conceits



and fancies gathered from this district. Emile Javelle, the famous author-alpinist (his title for himself was *clubiste inutile!*), in writing of his first ascent of the Dent du Midi, tells of his guide's fear of the dreadful, fiery, devastating dragon that for ages had inhabited the very district through which they must pass—that of Bonaveau and the *vallon* of Susanfe, above Champéry. I myself have had narrated to me at midnight creepy hair-lifting stories of the doings of malevolent spirits doomed since ages to frequent certain old chalets around Champéry, notably those on the high plateau of Barmaz—upon which chalets I involuntarily keep one careful eye whenever I am in their neighbourhood. On another occasion at Champéry, in early morning, a hurrying man, with awe in his eyes, breathlessly gave me to understand that a boy, whilst sound asleep, had been transported on a blanket in the dead of the previous night from his bed in a chalet high above the village to the bed of the torrent far below the village, and that he had awakened to find himself lying among the boulders with the icy water all but dashing over him.

But we must be moving on. To reach Bex we may either cross the bridge, the other side of which is the territory of Vaud, and follow the road that winds along the base of wooded cliffs, or else after crossing the bridge turn to the left up a path that leads through

the earthwork fortifications and then through vineyards to the sweet-chestnut woods of Chiètres and the timbered hill crowned by the remnants of the castle of Duin; or, if we are game for a long, delightful Alpine walk, we may leave St. Maurice by the south-eastern exit, cross the Rhone to the Baths of Lavey—boasting of evil-smelling but curative waters—past a picturesque waterfall, then up the ever-ascending road to the village of Morcles (taking its name from the great Dent which towers above it), thence a path leads up through the forest and across the pasture-slopes to the famous Croix de Javernaz<sup>1</sup>—famous for its grand view down the Rhone valley to Lac Léman and the Jura Mountains, and for its wonderfully rich Alpine flora; from there the descent is continuous until the highroad is struck at Bévieux, whence a tram runs in a few minutes to

## BEX

As a town Bex is somnolent; a sort of old-world slumber which is scarcely dissipated even when the hotels are at their fullest. Perhaps that mood agrees best with the eminently dream-like landscape. I know no scene in Switzerland that is more suggestive of the studied and bewitching pose of stageland than that

<sup>1</sup> The Croix de Javernaz may be seen in the picture of the Dent de Morcles taken from Bex in spring.



125 THE COIN DU JAVIERNE AND THE DOCTEUR MONTELLI





from the slopes of Montet immediately at the back of the town. On the left the Croix de Javernaz and the Dent de Morcles, with steep woods flowing to the plain; on the right the gaunt *Cime de l'Est* of the Dent du Midi, its base enveloped in a filmy blue haze; and just in the centre of the picture the chestnut groves on the hill of Chiètres, topped by the old Tour de Duin cleanly defined against the opening in the cliffs at St. Maurice—an opening cut as if on purpose to disclose the snows and ice of the Aiguille du Tour and the glaciers of Trient and Des Grands. Seen in spring, when cherry blossom powders the woods, or when the apple trees are rosy-white and the fields all starred with flowers; seen in autumn, when the year's last burst of life fires the beech and cherry and burnishes the larch and chestnut; seen at sunset, when the whole broad foreground is in cool-grey shadow and the sun's red glow rests only on the glaciers beyond St. Maurice; seen at such moments as these this landscape is truly one of fairyland, one of which one can never tire, and which surely will bring to Bex an ever-increasing popularity. At present this easy-going little town (except when the *foehn*<sup>1</sup> sets its châteaux ablaze—as has happened three times recently—or when its river, the Avançon, rising in vernal wrath, throws down the

<sup>1</sup> The hot, drying south wind from Italy. Sometimes up at Villars one can hear it roaring down below in the valley as it rushes through the gap at St. Maurice.

bridges and floods the streets!) is mostly renowned for its salt mines and baths. These salt mines are in the abrupt cliffs beyond Bévieux, and are said to have been discovered by a goat, which was noticed to be licking the rocks with most persistent relish. As goats are notoriously fond of salt, this tale may be quite true. To those who do not mind a rather damp scramble within the bowels of the cliff, these mines are well worth a visit.

But Bex is also renowned for its wild flowers. It was whilst director of the salt mines that Haller wrote his *Histoire des Plantes de la Suisse*. Milton could have been no keen observer of such things if he saw only fields of daisies! The hepatica (red, white, but mostly blue) in the woods about Bévieux are simply marvellous, relieved as they are by the carpet of dead beech leaves and by innumerable clumps of primroses, blue, white, and lilac violets, rich crimson and peacock-blue vernal vetch, yellow-and-white boxleaved polygala, and the lovely profusion of white and blush-tinted wood anemones. There are fields, too, of Star of Bethlehem on the plain towards the Rhone, where also the rare yellow tulip may be found. The brilliant-orange *Lilium croceum* and the curious and very local Snake's-head Lily are to be found in the neighbourhood, but I had better not say where. The gorge of the River Gryonne, at the back of the hill of Montet, is crowded in early

spring with the beautiful Snowflake. *Astrantia major* and *Trollius europæus* (the Globe Flower) luxuriate together by the hill of Chiètres. But perhaps the hill of Montet is the paradise *par excellence* of the botanist and flower lover. Here are orchids in abundance and variety—the Frog, Fly, Bee, Spider, and the yellowish-white Helleborine among others; *Gentiana verna* carpets the short turf with heavenly blue; the tall yellow gentian is on the open summit; *Erica carnea* grows on the steep hillside beyond the forest, and the shady woods that descend upon Bévieux are simply packed with Lily-of-the-Valley; the gem of this hill, however, is the mass of bright-blue *Lithospermum*, in colour almost rivalling the vernal gentian; why its Latin Christian name should be *purpurea* I really cannot tell.

This, then, is what Voltaire, in his love of town life and society, was pleased to look upon as being buried alive in the “caverns of Bex”!<sup>1</sup> Can we really be at a loss with Nature as she is at Bex? It would seem impossible. That Nature has shortcomings is only natural, and I think we may say, as says the inspired Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore, in *The Gardener*:

“Infinite wealth is not yours, my patient and dusky mother dust!  
The gift of gladness that you have for us is never perfect.  
The toys that you make for your children are fragile.  
You cannot satisfy all our hungry hopes, but should I desert  
you for that?”

<sup>1</sup> See *Lausanne* in this series.



Nature at Bex may not be perfect, but certainly in very many respects she is as perfect as she can be, and we are by no means deserting her though necessity obliges us to pass on to

## LES PLANS

For Nature in most lavish mood accompanies us. No matter at what season, the two and a half hours road from Bex to Les Plans is full of beauty for the eye and mind, but if there is one season above the others when this beauty is the more bewitching it is that of spring. Oh, why—a thousand times why!—is spring in the Alps so neglected by travellers seeking charm and pleasure? Why are the Kursaals crowded in spring by those who, at Custom's bidding, are waiting for a later, more healthy and resplendent season? Time will come when Custom in this matter will surely be sent to the rightabout, and Alpine spring will be as sought after as now is Alpine winter. It is only about twelve years ago that we who wintered on the Alps were looked upon as mere eccentrics; yet these few short years have proved that we were in truth the favoured pioneers of a season that is actually becoming prime rival to that of summer. In very faith I feel that so it shall be with spring, and that a few years hence a new and fascinating experience



will have revealed itself to a hitherto indifferent world.<sup>1</sup>

As one emerges from the timbered gorge, one is confronted at once by the jagged mountains of the chain of the Grand Muveran; not as they appear in summer, with bare, forbidding precipice and scree, but as they can appear in springtime only, clothed about in winter's dissipating snows and gladdened by an immediate foreground of glistening crocuses on the brown orchard slopes of Frenière. At this point, looking back, one has a splendid view of the giant hill that carries Villars upon its breast; but the village that one sees with its old church tower clinging to the side at a height of 1133 metres, and seemingly in difficulty to restrain itself from slipping into the gulf, is Gryon, where Juste Olivier, one of Switzerland's most tuneful poets, spent his last years and sang imperishable songs—songs that have found a place in the heart and life of the people, particularly when the theme is the *mi-été* festivities at Anzeindaz and Taveyannaz. These midsummer fêtes are held annually in connection with the cattle and cheese industry: they are delight-

<sup>1</sup> Hopeless pessimists there are everywhere and in every domain, but if there is one quarter of the globe where their unqualified discourse is out of place it is in the Alps. On the fiftieth anniversary (1913) of the Swiss Alpine Club there were those who did not hesitate to say: "Close your doors; your usefulness is past!" Just fancy! Why, the club was never more virile in its life; never more youthful; never more useful! The Alps have still much to give and tell men; in fact, as regards the generality of mankind, they are a mine of physical health and mental wealth that so far has only been scratched. And the club is needed to this end.

fully typical of old-world custom, and the poet has done much to render them impervious to the destructive note of modern sophistication. Both pasturages lie on the mountains between Villars and Les Plans, and are easy excursions from either of these places and from Gryon. Anzeindaz is the more wild and romantic of the two, its surroundings lending themselves admirably to these picturesque timeworn merrymakings; for the pasturage lies at the foot of the rugged Diablerets, at the foot, too, of a glacier, and at the base of a wild col which, although this is a closed district against hunters, is a spot that knows well the poachers of eagles. There can be little doubt of which way Juste Olivier would cast his vote with regard to the railway that it is proposed shall desecrate these fascinating wilds, dissipating their guileless, primitive associations. He would be on the side of the angels; and the angels are on the side of the *Heimatschutz* or League for the Preservation of Natural Beauty.

Les Plans lies snug upon a verdant, watered plateau surrounded on all sides but one by lofty mountains. To the west rises the steep glacier of Plan Névé and the massive form of the Grand Muveran, beloved of Eugène Rambert, famous alpinist-author-botanist, whose name, together with those of Juste Olivier and Jean Muret, is graven upon the Muveran's



LES PLANS - AVERNHEE - VIEWED FROM THE GRAND-BOIS





sheer precipice at romantic Pont de Nant. At this latter place—only a brief walk from Les Plans—there is a most interesting Alpine garden belonging to the University of Lausanne; it is especially charming in spring, with floral gems of purest hues backed by the translucent ice and snow of the Glacier de Martinet and the Dent de Morcles.

We must now return to Bex and there take the mountain railway up to Villars. It is an exceedingly picturesque line, winding about through woods and pastures, and providing at each turn a changing, ever-widening prospect. The mountains to which we have become accustomed in the plain take upon themselves superior proportions, and their increasing majesty and mystery come as an inevitable, surprised delight. But, for the journey, I will confide you, without apology, to the tender care of a versatile and well-known devotee of this lovely neighbourhood, my friend Mr. D. R. Kelleher, who in his own quaint way will transport you to

## VILLARS IN WANING SUMMER

“The incident occurred in a mountain train carrying slowly, as is its wont, up the wooded slope, a ‘conducted’ party of English tourists. A little grey-eyed man was sitting in the corner, opposite a

prosperous-looking woman dressed in a black dolman and clinging with traditional awe to her umbrella. Both were manifestly thrilled by the scenes through which they were passing, and not a little bewildered by the profusion of wonders in Alp, tree, and sky. At last the lady, devastated by her curiosity, broke silence in the following scene:—

The Lady (*looking anxiously through window at clump of pine trees rich with yellow cones*): "John, look at yon trees with the fruit on."

The Man: "Eh, but they look like bananas."

The Lady (*lighting up with a bright idea*): "Ask guide, John."

The Man (*turning to guide, a sad person, long stricken by stupid questions*). "Mister, are those things bananas?"

The Guide (*unable to rouse himself*): "I don't know."

The Man (*confidentially to his wife*): "He says he don't know."

The Lady: "It makes no odds, John, they're ower-ripe anyhow—but the place is grand!"

And 'the place is grand' so truly defines the scene *en route* to Villars, the phrase is so simple and comprehensive and so true, that we have been lucky to get it from the lady frae Lancashire even at the tail of her lazy mental attitude. In one sense it is the highest tribute that has ever been paid to our fairy fastness of Villars-sur-Ollon—this conception of the fir trees magic-laden with golden tropic fruit. If you do not believe it, take the train at Bex, in the little Rhone valley town of wooden houses where one dare not smoke '*en cas de vent*' for fear that a spark

flying loose should ignite the street and render you liable to a fine of six francs and confiscation of your pipe. And surely, if you want the most thrilling of all personal adventure-stories with which to startle your own village on your return from a daring holiday, this will suffice:—

“‘Strange places? Yes, I reckon I’ve seen some! I remember one night I lost a two-franc piece in a street in Bex. I struck a match to find it. Suddenly a wind blew out the light, and a policeman came rushing round the corner and arrested me. I was fined six francs for striking a match in a gale—the wind was no more than a draught from a window—and in the dark the policeman himself picked up the two-franc piece and walked off with it.’

“But I must not keep you too long with the fantastic, for already your train is passing Gryon, built like a bird’s nest in the hill, and soon Villars itself is reached. There get out, and having drunken of the panoramic ecstasy from the Diablerets round to the mountains of Savoy, walk down the road towards Chesières, snugly sleeping a hundred feet below Les Ecovets. You must not go as far as Chesières however, for having crossed the viaduct over the deep ravine a little beyond Villars I want you to turn round quickly and tell me your candid opinion of the picture—as soon as you can get your breath. For here, surely, if ever you are



sensitive to your environment, Beauty will take you to her breast. The clustering fir trees, framed about with velvet plots of green under a clear, blue-grey sky; the suggestion of the infinite in the peaks tossing in the heat-haze like a wild sea beyond the verge of a far-away coast; the chastening awe of the Glacier of Trient and the undertone of the gorge-water below rising like the spirit of reflection bred of the dense solitude of hill and sky—all these fine miracles about you! For this is the charm of Villars, that it lies a kind of lagoon of quiet beauty amid the circling terror of pitiless frost and snow. 'Domestic felicity' best describes the atmosphere of this little hill-town, the wrath and terror of rock and glacier mellowed by distance and yet near enough to heighten by contrast the soft rapture of Villars reposing in the arms of its hills. Go up another day to Les Ecovets, and, looking across to Leysin and the Tours d'Aï and away to Lac Léman and the dim-blue Jura mountains, say if ever ruler of the world claimed more glittering conquest than this of yours. For whether you are mountaineer or one of the people who 'never walk', the groves of Les Ecovets will always lure you. Painter, poet, rhapsodist or mere plain, blunt man, you there will find inspiration such as is not written in any book. It must indeed have been at Les Ecovets that the little English child,



waking suddenly from a noonday sleep, wished that he were always 'with Christmas'; for the magic of all pines that ever mimicked an Alpine glade on paper, the glamour of all the berries that made your long-ago December a lustrous time in hearth and hall, and the mystery of all Christmas memories of other climes is here consummated in Nature's own most ideal, most artistic scheme. I know no place like Villars for health and holiness: the high health of crystal air and shining peak, the strange holiness of solitude and the silent eloquence of the sky-embracing mountains; for there in the palpable hush are the mystic pipes of Pan that charm us on with tunes played 'not to the sensual ear' but are ever making for the spirit 'ditties of no tone'."

I scarce know what more to say of Villars after the moving eloquence of my friend; I am at a loss for simile and dainty word. And yet, more must be said. Not of Villars in the spring and summer—though the secretive little pine-surrounded lake of Chavonnes above Bretaye, and the steep slopes of the Chamossaire, glorious with purple viola and blue gentian, call insistently for notice—but of Villars in its sun-drenched robe of snow; for in winter Villars is amazingly transformed and its panorama need fear no rivals in the Alps. There is a grander and more Alpine note in winter; there is greater mystery,

austerity, sublimity in the wonderful alignment of peak and col and glacier; there is, too, a greater suggestion of power and vastness in the open landscape than there is in summer; and yet, the while one admires this wide-flung, steely grandeur, one is bathed the livelong day in glorious sunshine, there being no hours of shadow as at many winter resorts in the Alps. A cloudless day at Bretaye on the Chamosaire slopes, where ski-jumping is organized and whence Mont Blanc and his attendant Aiguilles are seen quite intimately, is a revelation in Alpine winter scenery—the deep ultramarine forests, the crisp and radiant snow, the intense warm-blue shadows, over the whole of which reigns a purity that is dazzling. But I must make way for a keen and skilful all-round sportsman, well known as a leader at

## VILLARS IN WINTER

“A few years ago Villars in winter was wrapped in slumber as far as the outside world was concerned. St. Moritz, Grindelwald, and Château d'Oex had long been known to winter sportsmen, but Villars and its vast possibilities from the point of view of sun worship and sport could not long remain unknown to the ever-increasing army of winter revellers in the Alps. In 1906 the tide set in and one hotel opened

its doors for a few weeks, and in spite of the long sleigh drive from Aigle, the diminutive rink, and other drawbacks incidental to the first opening of a new winter centre, the few score visitors were so delighted with their experience that the name of Villars was fairly launched upon the flood of popular esteem. The railway from Bex was run in winter for the first time in 1909, and since then the development of this sunny sports-place has been astonishing. Not only are all the hotels crowded, but numerous chalets and private pensions have sprung up, and the neighbouring resorts of Chesières, Arvèyes, Gryon, and even the diminutive village of Huémoz—a few miles farther west—now look upon the winter season as more important than that of summer. This result is in great part due to the wonderful natural position of this centre, unsurpassed by any in the Alps. Sheltered from the north by the range of the Chamosaire, and on the east by that of the Grand and Petit Muveran, the Dent Favre and the Dent de Morcles, there is a magnificent view towards the south on the Dent du Midi, the Glacier du Trient and the Aiguilles Verte and Dru, and the horizon is wide and open enough to allow a minimum of seven hours' sunshine in December, and the absence of wind enables skaters and curlers to lunch on the rink without wrapping up in mufflers and overcoats. But the situation is only



entitled to part of the credit for the prominent place taken by Villars in the list of Alpine winter resorts. A great deal is due to the wonderful organization of the sports and the bold policy of those responsible in spending large sums in making and equipping one of the finest skating rinks in Switzerland and the finest toboggan run outside the Engadine. The icemen are the most skilled in their profession; the skating instructors are past masters in their respective styles; and the ski-ing professional attached to the Sports Club is one of the most distinguished runners and jumpers in the country. But besides these paid professors, Villars has the advantage of having a committee of organization, every member of which is an adept in one or more branches of sport.

"Sport is indeed an amusement but also a business at Villars. Visitors coming out from the fog and gloom of an English winter are satisfied for the first few days to revel in the glorious air and sunshine, to potter about on skates or skis, or to toboggan in desultory fashion, but when they have got their ski-ing and skating legs and have learned to take the rink corner of the ice-run without failing, they become filled with enthusiasm to go for a long ski expedition, to do the ice-run against time, or pass one of the skating tests in either English or International style, or perhaps they are tempted by the array of silver bowls or



challenge cups. This is where the work of the committee comes in. Each Sunday afternoon a body of athletic, serious-looking men—presumably taking their pleasures sadly like true traditional Englishers—may be seen in earnest deliberation in a remote corner of a certain smoking lounge. It is the Villars Parliament, and the result of its protracted sitting is anxiously awaited by the hundreds of visitors who crowd around the 'Programme for the Week' posted on notice boards in each hotel. For ski-ers there may be a run to Bovonnaz, a gymkhana at Bretaye or a competition for the Villars Golden Ski or Villars Ski-ing Cup, or perhaps a test of the B.S.A. For skaters there may be an ice carnival, a hockey match or an ice gymkhana, or an N.S.A. test. Tobogganers may perhaps be able to risk their limbs in a race against time on the perfectly engineered but rather appalling-looking ice-run, and curlers may perhaps note that they have a chance of getting even with the Morgins or Montana Curling Clubs, against whom each year out and home matches are arranged. And when the day's work is over, and ski-ers, skaters, curlers, and tobogganers are back in their respective hotels, feeling 'splendidly fit' after a bath and a meal, think you that they settle down to an armchair and a pipe or a novel? Not they!—the winter sportsman and sportswoman work hard during the day, but the evening finds them still

restless for amusement. The programme must therefore show a succession of fancy-dress balls and *cotillons*, bridge drives and bowling matches, or the committee will be called a band of slackers, or perhaps they may receive a deputation of fascinating young ladies who wish to know why there has been only one masked ball during the week in such and such hotel, or perhaps some charming old ladies want to know why they have not been catered for in the matter of bridge or whist. Nor does the rush and movement slacken throughout the season. No matter whether one arrives in December or February one always feels that the season is at its height. And so it goes on until the ice begins to get soft and the rink has to be closed for a couple of hours in the middle of the day, and the ice-run is only open till ten o'clock, and ski-ers have to start out betimes to make sure of good snow, and at last, say towards the end of the first week in March, the ice is no longer skateable, the snow is too soft for long expeditions, and the first flowers appear upon the Chamossaire. Spring has come, and the winter sportsman, if he is not also a botanist or flower lover but *is* a child of Custom, will turn his face towards his home, thinking that the Alps are 'done for' until July.

"The only sport which Villars has hitherto lacked is bobsleighing, and this has now been remedied by

the construction of a bob-run nearly three miles long. The new railway from Villars to Bretaye enables bobs to take full advantage of this run, and also gives a great impetus to ski-running, as it brings the ski-runner to a height of 6000 feet, and he is then fresh for the Chamossaire—the classic run and the scene of the Villars Golden Ski race—or the Chaux Ronde, whence there is a wonderful view of both the Oberland and the Mont Blanc chain. He can also more easily do the long day's trip to Château d'Oex by way of Lac Chavannes, La Forclaz<sup>1</sup>, and the Col des Mosses, which is one of the most interesting of expeditions, though it should only be undertaken by a fairly expert runner.

“The snow on the Chamossaire is generally in fine condition until the middle of January, but it is exposed to the full heat of the sun, and the Chaux Ronde on the opposite side of the valley affords better running except after a fresh fall of snow. Among other ski-runs to the north of Villars are La Truche (5886 feet) and the Plan Chamois (6194 feet), which may be done in two and a half or three hours with one hour for the descent. The route lies through Chesières and Les Ecovets, where there are some excellent north slopes for practice. The snow on

<sup>1</sup> There are a number of Forclazs in the Alps. This one is a small village below the Chamossaire and facing Sépey.



this run is best after a fresh fall or late in the season, when the sun has changed the hard crust into the watery surface on which the expert can run almost as well as on powdery snow. The Chaux de Traveyannaz is one of the best runs in the neighbourhood and can be done in three and a half or four hours, with descent to Gryon in about one and a half hours. The best day's expedition is that to Bovonnaz, and the easiest way to do it is to take the early train to Gryon, thence to the top in two and three-quarter hours, and back to Gryon in about one and a half hours. The snow on this run is nearly always in perfect condition and the country is distinctly more Alpine than that on the Chamossaire side. Chamois are nearly always to be seen on the other side of the ridge separating Bovonnaz from the Grand Muveran, and on one occasion a ski-runner got a good snapshot of a herd of these shy animals lazing in the sun just on the other side of the ridge, quite unaware of his presence until they heard the click of the shutter. What a relief it must have been to them to find afterwards that it was only a snapshot!

"Villars, whose rink is the second largest in Switzerland, is now regarded as the most important centre of English figure skating.<sup>1</sup> The English Figure

<sup>1</sup> The rare excellence of the ice is in no small measure due to the insistent care of the Vice-President of the Skating Club, Mr. A. G. Topham. Colonel Cobbett, Hon. Sec. of the National Skating Association, is a member of the Villars Sports Club.



Skating Club has a portion of the rink reserved for its members, and tests of the N.S.A. are held weekly, there being nearly always available a number of first-class judges. Mr. E. F. Benson, the well-known novelist, has made Villars his winter quarters for several years. He is a gold-medallist of the N.S.A. and has done a great deal for the encouragement of English figure skating. His advice and assistance are always at the disposal of the novice whose aspiration is to get into one of Mr. Benson's 'figures': as a 'caller' of interesting figures he has no superior. The *Sanctum Sanctorum* of the vast rink would not seem itself without the bronzed and hatless head and the white-gloved, immobile hands of this great exponent of the smooth and ungymnastic art of English figure skating. Easy? Try it! Its very calm, rigid, and unemotional facility is its enormous difficulty.

"But the International skaters are not neglected; for they, too, have their enclosure, and it is generally occupied by a number of seriously active practitioners. There is also an intermediate or amphibious class of skater which has not made up its mind which style to adopt, and these—they are known facetiously as 'Baby Wobblers'—are allowed to use the waltzing enclosure by passing quite a simple test.

"Then, the weird cry of the curler is loud in the land; for curling is perhaps the most flourishing and

most highly organized of all branches of sport at Villars, and the Henderson Bishop Cup for ladies and the Holmes Tarn Cup for men are among the most coveted of Villars trophies.<sup>1</sup> A word must be said of a recognized and quaint institution at Villars—the Curlers' Court. The ceremony of initiation into the ranks of 'made curlers' takes place in the dungeons of the Hotel Muveran and is sufficiently terrifying to the novice. The Court is generally held after the initiation ceremony; the president is styled 'My Lord' and his assistant is his 'Officer'. The rules of the Ancient Order of Curlers are strictly observed and any breach of these rules is visited by a fine ranging from five centimes to one franc. Thus one may be fined for having a bald head or a bad cold, another for not being as handsome as he might be, or for the size of his boots; speaking or rising without his Lordship's permission is also fineable. A well-known skater—one of the few honorary members of the Villars Sports Club—is frequently fined for not paying more attention to the noble pastime of curling. When the Court rises (with the President's permission, of course), the fines are auctioned for the benefit of the club and frequently realize large sums. All of which savours not a little of Mr. Punch's famous set

<sup>1</sup> Mr. A. Henderson Bishop, Vice-President of the Royal Caledonian Curling Club, is President of the Villars Curling Club, and Captain Holmes Tarn is Patron.

of rules for the Bushey Art School; and it is all so very, very serious.

"Ice Hockey has become very popular in Switzerland of late, and Villars was one of the first centres to join the Swiss Ice Hockey Association. Matches are played annually against neighbouring clubs, and teams occasionally come from Zurich and even from such distant places as Brussels and Prague. The scene on the rink when a match is in progress is one of great animation, the enclosure being surrounded by a crowd of skaters of both sexes who shout themselves hoarse encouraging the Villars team. The ladies frequently have matches against the men, who play left-handed, and also against the boys. It is here that La Combe and the Château de la Rosey from Rolle,<sup>1</sup> and Sillig's school from Vevey have won some of their spurs.

"I have mentioned the ice-run on which only skeletons<sup>2</sup> are allowed, but there is also an equally well made though smaller and easier run on which only ordinary Swiss *luges* are allowed; and this is used chiefly by ladies and children. Races are held regularly, and as this run lies parallel with the skeleton run for a great part of its length, the same telephone can be used for timing these races.

<sup>1</sup> See *Lausanne* in this series.

<sup>2</sup> Let there be no misunderstanding among the uninitiated: these skeletons are a form of *luge*, which is a Swiss toboggan.



"As I have already said, the spirit of activity is indefatigable at Villars. When the day's outdoor excitement is over there comes more excitement indoors. The Dramatic Club gives several performances each season on the fine stage at the Hotel Muveran, among its repertoire being *The Villain of Villars* and *Violet goes to Villars*, both from the facile and ingenious pens of Captain and Mrs. Holmes Tarn, and far above the usual amateur productions.

"I must, however, cease. Indeed, I have no permission to go further. Much more could, and really ought to be said, but perhaps the foregoing is sufficient to show what Villars can do for winter sportsmen.

"G. C. DOBBS."

Yes; more undoubtedly could be said. In fact, a book such as this could well be written about each of the places we are visiting. But necessity is inexorable, and we must leave this very night for Aigle, though high fête is in the air and the huge rink is illuminated with Chinese lanterns, and a masked and costumed cortège, led by the stentorian strains of the village band, with Mr. Dobbs as majordomo at the head, is shuffling and gliding slowly round preparatory to dispersal for a display of gorgeous fireworks. Had it been daylight we might have walked down by way of Chesières and Huémoz to the large village of Ollon, home of the accomplished painter, Frédéric





IN THE VILLAGE OF CHESTER



Rouge, one of Switzerland's most sincere and virile draughtsmen, and thence to our destination. As it is, we must return the way we came and take train from Bex to

## AIGLE

A quiet old market town to-day, and *chef-lieu* of the largest district in Vaud, Aigle in 1529 was selected by Berne, after the disputation in the Cathedral of Lausanne, as the starting-point for the preaching of the Reformation, and it was here that Farel, Calvin's noisy mouthpiece, made his first proselytes. The many-towered old castle, standing upon higher ground at the back of the town and amongst the vineyards, dates from the thirteenth century, but was burnt by Berne and afterwards rebuilt by her in 1534; to-day the great central tower serves as a prison, and in the body of the building is held the district court of justice. Not many years ago certain recesses in the woods at the back of Aigle were famous as the haunt of the lovely and scarce brown and gold Lady's Slipper orchid; but, alas! that is of the past. Aigle at present is mostly noted among strangers for its golf links and the skating that is to be had on what is known as the Old Rhone—an ancient bed of the river now running a mile or so away; it is also the

station at which one alights for Leysin, Sépey, and the Vallée des Ormonts. Much as I would like to walk up the picturesque Ormonts valley to Ormonts-Dessus and Vers l'Eglise at the foot of "*le bastion titanesque et dévasté des Diablerets*" (quoting M. Jules Monod, of guidebook fame) and study the flora of which Mr. H. Stuart Thompson, the well-known botanist, speaks so highly, and hear from the peasants stories of the bellicose demons who infest the wild summits and war among themselves, using huge rocks as missiles; much as I would like to visit Sépey and the ruins of the Château d'Aigremont, where there is a subterranean passage in which it is said the last Lord of Aigremont is shut up with an awful horned ram, and is engaged in counting and recounting his hoarded treasure; or to push on to the Col des Mosses amongst the exquisite fields of flowers; or—— But it cannot be! We must adhere to the programme and must now take the electric railway that mounts to

## LEYSIN

There is a note of sadness in the journey, notwithstanding the extreme beauty of the landscape; for Leysin is one of the most noted stations in Europe for the treatment of pulmonary disease.



With its numerous and huge sanatoria dotted about near the forests above the old village and its church, built in 1445, upon the southern slopes of the curiously striking Tours d'Aï, whose gaunt and ruddy cliffs dominate the whole and protect it from the bitter north and north-east winds, Leysin is a veritable sun-trap and has long been known as a successful agent in the fight which the skilled doctors wage for health. The perspective, too, must aid considerably both patients and doctors in the struggle, for it is second only to that from Villars. Perhaps it is in winter that Leysin is seen at its brightest and best, and Mr. L. A. Emery, President of the Leysin Sports Club, has kindly contributed the following authoritative information about this famous centre when it is stirred by the spirit of

## WINTER PASTIMES

“Although Leysin is a resort for invalids for whom all violent exercise is forbidden, yet it should not be forgotten that out of these 4000 winter residents there are at least 1000 onetime patients who have been completely cured, and who return year after year to the slopes that gave them back their health. This explains a seeming paradox—the immense enthusiasm for winter sport and the number of sensational

victories that stand to the credit of Leysin's sportsmen. By reason of its altitude (1450 metres) and its unique position sheltered from the winds, Leysin is assured of good snow everywhere, excellent 'runs', and smooth ice on its rinks. All sports are popular—Bobsleighing, Tobogganing, Ski-ing, Skating, Hockey, Clay-pigeon Shooting, and Rifle Shooting; and all is directed by the *Sporting Club de Leysin*, one of the most important of its kind in Switzerland. The club was formed ten years ago (1903), at an epoch when engineered runs were unknown and sportsmen and sportswomen were content with the homely, modest *luge*. Davos had only begun to know the bobsleigh in 1902, and Leysin, not wishing to be behindhand, joined two *luges* together with a board, and thus was *à la mode*. The success of this contrivance, rushing down the slopes, spreading consternation and terror among oldfashioned *lugeurs*, and beating all records for speed, was immediate and enormous. The example of this pioneer bob was quickly followed, and then it was that the Sporting Club offered its first Challenge Cup, and soon began to carry off cups from rival centres. Its list of victories is indeed significant of its members' prowess. For instance, at Davos, in 1904, the *Coupe de France* was won by the bob *La France* (Captain Bonford), and the same year the same Leysin captain won the championship of Vaud and also the

championship of the Vaudois Alps. This latter championship was won again a few years later by the bob *Russie* (M. Coussis). In 1910 M. Renaud de la Fregeolière, on his bob *Jeanne d'Arc*, carried off the *Coupe du Président de la République*, creating a record that has not yet been beaten; and the same bob won the *Coupe du Mont Blanc* at Chamonix. In 1913, with M. Coussis at the steering wheel and M. Ewald at the brake, the bob *Russie* won the Challenge Cup of the *Association Suisse Romande des Clubs de Bobsleigh* against fifty competitors. Leysin, indeed, is in the front rank of bobsleigh racing, and the club actually offers, besides innumerable lesser prizes, six Challenge Cups for this one form of sport: The *Coupe de Leysin*, *Coupe Hansmann*, *Coupe Handicap Garlakass*, *Coupe du Sporting Club de Leysin*, *Coupe Régionale*, and *Coupe de l'Association Suisse Romande*.

"But if bobsleighting takes the lead at Leysin, the other sports are not by any means neglected. The hockey team is a strong one, and in 1910-11 Leysin was the scene of the first round in the tournament for the Swiss National Championship, and will be the scene of the second round in the tournament for 1913-4. The Captain of the Swiss National team, M. Bernard Bossi, was for two years President of the S. C. L., and no fewer than three Leysin players were



in the International Hockey Tournament at Chamonix in 1913. Ski-ing is not, perhaps, in such high favour as at Villars and Morgins, yet it has no lack of devotees, for whom there are gymkhanas as well as two running competitions carrying two Challenge Cups. There are, too, gymkhanas and carnivals for skaters, and in the long list of prizes in this section are a Challenge Cup for racing and another for figure skating. Nor is the modest *lugeur* forgotten in these contests; and, in this regard, one day is set apart especially for the villagers.<sup>1</sup> And over and above all this activity are the shooting matches, pigeon shooting, or ball-trap being particularly popular here in winter, attracting some of the finest shots in Switzerland. Rifle shooting, also, is admirably installed, and meets with keen support, the winners in the numerous competitions receiving gold, silver, and bronze medals.

“To say that apart from the Challenge Cups already mentioned, there are seventy other cups to be won, is to say that Leysin flourishes remarkably in the realm of winter pastimes.

“L. A. EMERY

“President of the S. C. L.”

<sup>1</sup> This admirable custom also finds a place at Villars and Champéry. For their pleasures in the Alps visitors owe much to the kindness of the Swiss people, however much may be said about the manifest benefit brought to the country by its so-called *industrie des étrangers*. It makes for less heartburnings and more good fellowship to bring the Swiss themselves into the circle of our enjoyment in their Fatherland; and it is a thoughtful attention that would bear extension.



Looking across the Rhone valley to the Dent du Midi, a rift in the hills can be seen through the blue haze: that is the Val d'Illeiez, whither we must now turn our steps in order to gain Morgins and Champéry, tucked cosily away almost upon the frontier of Savoy. As we leave the sunny slopes of Leysin to take train for Aigle, there comes a striking demonstration of the healthful beneficence of snow when treated sanely. In the hot sunshine, upon the glistening snowfield, little children, boys and girls, wearing nothing but bathing-drawers, hat, and snowshoes, are ski-ing bravely, or are snowballing each other, boisterously happy in the stinging warmth of it all. They are the tiny patients of a doctor who is proving in miraculous fashion the health-giving power in Switzerland of what in England gives us the shivers and compels us to put on extra clothing. It is distinctly reminiscent of what snow can do for chilblains and frostbites—the glow of life that it imparts; but I must not be supposed to be advocating it as a general and pleasurable practice to be followed by all and sundry in the Alps in winter.

Once back at Aigle, we must take the little local railway that crosses the Rhone and lands us at the quiet market town of Monthey, in Valais, and at the foot of the Dent du Midi, whence an electric mountain railway will take us to Champéry. The fault about

mountain railways connected with the railways of the plain is that you are apt to go right through to your destination, thus missing much that is of interest *en route*. This applies to Monthey; for all around this cigar-manufacturing *bourg* there is much that really repays a halt. So halt we will.

Passing through the marketplace and crossing the old covered wooden bridge spanning the Vièze—a swift little river hurrying to join the Rhone, and whose source is in the mountains beyond Champéry—and following the road which rises straight in front of us across steep chestnut-shaded slopes, we come to the delightful hamlet of Choëx, the elegant white steeple of whose small white church is so prominent a landmark from Bex. In spring and early summer this quiet retreat, perched high among the rolling woods at the base of the Dent du Midi, and with its broad view across the Rhone valley to Villars, Leysin, the Tour d'Ai, and the Diablerets, is very charming. There is here, too, a wonderful wealth of flowers beneath the chestnut trees and in the woods and fields; indeed the neighbourhood of Monthey is quite as interesting in this respect as is the neighbourhood of Bex, and it can produce certain gems that are strangers on the other side of the valley. Not far from the road at *Fin du Bruit* an ancient Druid's altar has been discovered: great formidable rocks

placed mysteriously as if on purpose, with an underground cavern beneath, containing, among other prehistoric objects, a stone coffin with a skeleton inside. Also in this subterranean chamber may be seen a crack that extends upwards in the rock to beneath the altar-rock above-ground, and some years ago I was told by the custodian that it was through this crack that the priests shouted up the messages of the gods to the assembled and trembling people. This may have been so, for it only follows the lines of the old Egyptian oracles; but unfortunately the tendency is to fake, or to supplement by the aid of plausible imagination, all that is authentic in such remains as these, particularly when a charge is made for viewing them. At any rate I believe I am right in saying that the stone-coffined skeleton, although genuinely prehistoric, was not discovered where it now lies, but in the quarries on the other side of Monthey. However, it is possible that the owner of this skeleton in life was one who worshipped in fear and trembling at this sacrificial altar; and it is a fascinating process to picture on these quiet, flowered slopes the quaking half-clad crowd, the human victim prone upon the great rock-slab, the white-bearded, white-robed priest with fanatic eye and gleaming knife upturned to the heavens—and all the awful ritual of those ancient heathen ceremonies.

And now we must push on to



## MORGINS

Of course the orthodox way nowadays is to take the train to the village of Troistorrents and then to walk or drive to Morgins. Personally I prefer to walk from Monthey, as in days past, keeping to the old cobbled road as much as possible;<sup>1</sup> or, better still, mounting the woods and forest which rise immediately from the *Pierre des Marmettes*, and then crossing the high pastures leading eventually down upon Morgins. This latter route, although unusual, is preferable by far for those lovers of Nature who are eager to reap all they can from the delightful scenery. And then, all the time to the left, for nearly five miles, towers the glorious Dent du Midi with its seven peaks. I imagine that there is no more individual, graceful, and arresting mountain in the Alps of the whole wide world. Like the Matterhorn, it stands out, a living personality amid its neighbour mountains. As among the many and striking peaks at Zermatt the eye rests at once and all but always upon the Matterhorn, so among the many and striking peaks in this district of the Rhone valley does the eye immediately rest upon

<sup>1</sup> These rough and steep old roads are met with all over Switzerland, where they are crossed and recrossed by the modern, less rapid, and more circuitous tourist roads. Many of them probably date back to Roman times, if not further, and are very suggestive of the extreme hardship and toil of peasant life in the past—that sturdy peasant life which has done so much to make Switzerland what it is.





THE POST TO MID-TRON RILLARS



the Dent du Midi. One never tires of it. It is the first and the last upon which one gazes; it is the first and the last that one remembers afterwards throughout one's days. Neither chocolate boxes nor picture postcards can dim its great appealing beauty. No *telephote* contortion of its exquisite proportions, in conjunction with an over-small Castle of Chillon, can destroy its repute and fascination. Whether it be seen in all its breadth from Montreux, Champéry, or Lac Champex, or as a single peak from Bex or St. Maurice, it is unique, inimitable. No wonder that it was Javelle's first absorbing love; no wonder that Juste Olivier and Eugène Rambert were moved to voice its mastering charms; no wonder that, before these other wielders of poetic pens, Senancour made his home at its feet and wrote rhapsodically of it in his famous *Obermann*.

We have arrived at Morgins; or, at least, we have it now before us, lying below the slopes we are descending—sheltered, secluded, rustic little Morgins, with its encircling hills, its dark pine forests and ruddy stream, its hotels and chalets embedded in green, and its quiet deep-green lake lying beside the Col de Morgins, whence a road winds over into Savoy, down the Valley of Abondance to Evian and Thonon on the shores of Lac Léman.<sup>1</sup> The red iron waters of Morgins

<sup>1</sup> See *Lausanne* in this series.

have been long famous in fighting anæmia, and the quietude of the place itself is sought in summer by those suffering from overwork. But of late it has acquired a new fame, almost, if not quite, eclipsing the old: a fame that Mr Arnold Lunn, one of the best known and most intrepid of ski-ers in the Alps, has consented to explain: the fame of

## MORGINS IN THE SNOW

“The Englishman has marked out a few corners of the Alps as being exclusively British. There are, however, neutral zones where Britons and Continentals meet, but the Englishman keeps in the main to certain well-known routes. You will find him at Zermatt, at Grindelwald, at Binn, and at Arolla. At Champex he will be outnumbered, and at Morgins he was, until quite recently, entirely unknown. It was the discovery of Morgins as a winter sports centre that brought the tardy Englishman to this retiring valley.

“Years ago I had looked across the waters of Léman to the range of fronting hills, and idly wondered whether some hidden and silent valley lurked among their recesses. Leslie Stephen’s “Bye Day in the Alps”, which I discovered in an old *Cornhill*—it was not reprinted in the “Playground of Europe”—gave



form and personality to an outstanding sentinel of these Savoy hills, but it was some time before I explored for myself these outlying heights that guard the central citadels of the Alps. Since then I have often revisited the long defile that leads to Morgins.

“You reach Morgins by a curious little mountain railway that connects Monthey and Champéry. At Troistorrents you leave the train and prepare for a sleigh drive up the valley which branches off to the right. Troistorrents is a characteristic Alpine village. It lies in the heart of the Val d’Illiez, one of the loveliest of Alpine glens, which is still quite unspoiled. The big hotels of Champéry are hidden from view and there is nothing to disturb the quiet music of the three streams that meet below the parish church, and give to Troistorrents its name. Of course the chief glory of this valley is the incomparable Dent du Midi. This mountain, or rather this grouping of separate and successive rock towers, has a curious fascination; it is so distinctive. There are domes not unlike Mont Blanc, pyramids that resemble the Matterhorn, peaks very like the Weisshorn; but in the whole Alpine range you will find no match to the Dent du Midi. Its outline is unique. Its history is interesting, and considering its moderate height it has attracted a very large share of Alpine literature. Like so many mountains, it was first climbed by the parish priest of a neighbour-

ing valley.<sup>1</sup> Its conquest occurred in 1784. Sixty years later five men of the Valais climbed the beautiful eastern peak that rises like a lion above the towers of Bex. The last turret, the Eperon, only yielded its secret as late as 1892.

“Those who have read Javelle’s delightful Alpine memoirs will remember the fascination which this peak influenced on the great climber. ‘I am completely captivated,’ he writes, ‘by the Dents du Midi . . . is there anything astonishing in it? For two years it has been before my eyes every moment of the day.’<sup>2</sup> The eastward aspect of my window provided that the first image on which my waking eyes should rest was its graceful and slender profile. At table a malicious fate had chosen my place so well that between my two opposite companions the seven peaks of the *arête* were visible to me in a frame. What I specially love is the eastern peak. She may not be the highest, but is she not the proudest, the slenderest, the most beautiful? Is it not the peak which gives the mountain all its character, and, in spite of the few metres by which her western sister overtops her, is it not she who first strikes the beholder and who dwells in the memory?’”

“Let us first dispose of the rough guidebook facts. Let me tell you that Morgins is 4800 feet above the

<sup>1</sup> The curé of Champéry

<sup>2</sup> Javelle was a schoolmaster at Vevey, on Lac Léman.

sea level; that it enjoys more than its fair share of snow; that it is one of the great ski-ing centres of the Alps; and that the sun can find its way to the rink during the best part of the day, while it discreetly keeps off the northern ski-ing slopes save for a short interval too brief to damage the snow.

"Each winter sport centre has its own peculiar atmosphere. Life at Morgins is comparatively peaceful. We danced, of course; we played the usual absurd games—trundling the potato and so forth—but we were unmolested by a potato-trundling committee with a special and peculiar badge. We were not troubled by those who come to the winter Alps in order that they may bask in the sun. The men of Morgins were built of sterner stuff. Morgins will go down to history as the home of a great renaissance. The English School of Skaters, driven out of their old shrines, have founded a new Temple at Morgins. I do not know much about skating myself, though I believe I am the worst skater that ever passed the third-class test, but I am told by those who do that English skating reflects our national characteristics with most uncanny acuteness. I gather that the main difference between the two schools is ethical. The foreigner, when he wishes to make a '3' turn, waves his arms, kicks his leg into the air, sways his body, and in general advertises his skill with no



little success. The ladies stand round and applaud, while the English skater curls a contemptuous upper lip. Not for him the vulgar *réclame*. Body stiff, unemployed leg gummed firmly into his trousers, arms rigid . . . a twinkle of the shoulder blade . . . a slight movement of the little finger . . . and the hardest of 'B' turns is a thing of the discreetly successful past . . . no ladies stop and applaud . . . only the initiated can detect the amazing skill involved in this modest performance. The aim of the Continental school is to emphasize apparent difficulty. The ideal of the English school is to conceal difficulty. They skate for the joy of the thing, careless of applause. The strong silent reserve of the Briton that scorns vulgar advertisement finds perfect expression in the sedate, dignified curves of the English school . . . I hope I have made myself clear.

"But this is not an article on the rise and fall and subsequent renaissance of the chaste and refined school of skating. I must content myself with stating that Morgins is the winter home of the great apostle of the counter-reformation. Mr. Humphry Cobb pilots his novices into the true faith. Mr. Cobb and Rudolph Bauman between them could make ice at the Equator, and the rink at Morgins is all that devotion and genius can achieve. Ice making, as Bauman understands the craft, is one of the fine arts.



"But it is as a ski-ing centre that Morgins is famous. The classic expedition is, of course, the Porte du Soleil. A mighty host left for this pass the morning after my arrival. In the night it had rained at other centres which shall be nameless, but at Morgins, which is a well-behaved spot, it had snowed, and the old crust was covered with a beautiful dusting of fresh snow some two or three inches deep. It was a glorious day. The clouds, that so often drift up after rain, rested on the summits of the hills, and showed through casual openings the blue sky of an Alpine winter. We wandered slowly up a narrow valley, along a stream gagged with the covering of snowdrifts, between pines that had not yet shaken off the new load of snow. We soon branched off to the left, and marched up open slopes to a little chalet, where we had lunch. Here he who had carried the beer had an opportunity of testing the ratio of potential thirst as anticipated in the valley, when the rucksacks were being packed, with the actual thirst as exhibited on the mountain-side, when rucksacks were unloaded. After the customary pipe, and the still more customary remarks, such as 'Who would believe that one could sit in the sun with one's coat off in mid winter;' or 'Fancy the poor fellows grinding away in their city offices;' or again, 'Just think of the . . .'; after, in short, we had smoked all the tobacco that there was, drunk all

the beer that there was, made all the quips that there were, ruptured all the infinitives that were still united, and exhausted every cliché dear to those who describe the Alps in winter—after all this (the proper ritual of a ski-ing lunch) we turned upwards once more and marched gaily forward to meet the pass. A long upward stretch brought us to the foot of the last slope, a few more tacks and the Dent du Midi shot out beyond the portals of the sun. At any time this view must be singularly beautiful; as we saw it the vision from the pass had a peculiar loveliness. Fleecy clouds driven up by the breeze, ‘shepherded by the slow, unwilling wind’, rested on the highest snows without materially restricting the view. The battlements of the Dent du Midi were free from haze, and the upper reaches of the Val d’Illiez, sadly brown, formed a satisfying contrast to the snowy slopes round Morgins. Poor Champéry! Scores of disconsolate exiles, thirsting for the real winter, deserted Champéry for Morgins during the course of the winter.

“Of the descent it is hard to speak with decent restraint. There are some two thousand feet leading direct from the pass to the glen. As we found them the snow was in perfect condition. One put one’s ski together and let gravity do the rest. You start off with a thousand feet of easy, gradual slopes, which you can take nearly straight. There is not a single

VIEW FROM A CORNER OF THE HOUSE, LAKE MICHIGAN







difficulty to give one pause; it is all plain sailing, or rather plain ski-ing. Then comes a slight ascent, promptly followed by one of the best bits of running in the district. If you can take this stretch of some thousand feet without using your sticks or pulling up you are something of a runner. You begin with a gentle swoop down into a hollow, you swing round by a telemark or stemming turn, and then you have a wide choice of some good snow for the next lap. Follows a somewhat steep slope, which will give you a chance of putting in four sharp curves; swing round to the right, and then take the last stretch of a hundred feet straight, and wind up with a Christiania before the stream. The rest of the run home is not so good, but it affords some very excellent short bits and some pretty work through the woods.

“An alternative to this expedition is to cross the Porte du Soleil to Champéry. You start with a stiffish traverse, and then spin down some divine slopes to the Col de Coux, winding up with a run down an easy pass to Champéry. In a good season, when there is plenty of snow at Champéry, this run is well worth making. After an excellent light repast at Champéry you return by road to Troistorrents, quite enjoyable ski-ing of its kind, and then home either on foot or by sleigh. Or you might sleep at Champéry and return the next day over the same pass.

"The second expedition was almost as good as the Porte du Soleil. In fact I am inclined to give it the place of honour. Much the same party started off quite gaily for the Bellevue. We climbed steepish sunny slopes above the hotel for a couple of hours to a typical little chalet, where we had lunch. One of the party was something of an epicure, and he had provided himself with a spirit lamp, and so we had the benefit of hot tea—a great luxury. After lunch two of us climbed still higher, to the actual summit. It was well worth the slight additional toil. The view was lovelier than I had anticipated. The Bellevue is well placed, as it commands the great giants of the Pennine Alps. In the west Mont Blanc towered into a stainless sky. The Dent du Midi showed up well above Champéry, and beyond on the left the Combin showed terrace upon terrace of dazzling snows. I fancy we also saw the Weisshorn and Dent Blanche, but I am not certain on these points. Certainly the chiefs of the Oberland greeted us from beyond the Diablerets, and my companion hailed with joy the cone of the Wetterhorn, which he had climbed in earlier days. At our feet lay the long arm of Geneva, and we made out with interest Chillon's snow-white battlements. The winter resorts above Montreux looked woefully brown and bare of snow, and we turned with satisfaction to contrast them with

the white slopes of Morgins. We were more than ever convinced that Morgins enjoys even more snow than a place of its very respectable altitude deserves. The view from the Bellevue has the charm of the prospects from those lesser summits of the Alps that are not too near the greater peaks to be overshadowed, nor too remote to lose the essential majesty of the greater giants. The blending of lake and forest, quiet snow-clad hills, and forest-bound cliffs has a charm lacking in the innermost recesses of the chain. The descent to the chalet was very fine. The first hundred feet required some care, but this was followed by a long slope just steep enough to take at full speed without any fear of a fall. A gentle swing and a beautiful piece of snow brought us back to the rest of the party. We then spent a merry half-hour or so practising swings, and once more turned to the pass between the Bellevue and the Corbeau. This brought us on to the northern slopes, and a perfect dive over steep, but not too steep, gradients led to an opening in the wood, and by the time we had run through the forest we felt that we had acquitted ourselves tolerably well, and enjoyed some capital sport. But there was much good snow still to furrow. Some long, open slopes of good snow gave plenty of opportunity to put into practice the swings and turns we had been performing so gaily



after lunch. These ended, the snow became worse, and the last short stretch into the valley was not a joy; we had descended some distance below Morgins, and had pierced the belt below which rain had descended instead of welcome snow. This short bit was of very brief duration, and only served to accentuate the glorious running above. At Vonne we had a cup of tea and some delightful honey, and so home across the short road pass.

“These are the only two expeditions which I can vouch for from personal knowledge. But unless the map lies, and unless other runners at Morgins also speak the thing which is not, there must be a number of other expeditions up to this standard. There are fine slopes between Vonne and Chatel, and a jolly expedition can be made to La Chapelle. The Val de Morgins and its bounding hills still offer plenty of prizes to the diligent explorer after new routes, and the pass at the head of the valley should certainly be crossed. For the mountaineer there are fine high-level routes to Salvan, Sixt, and Chamonix, and I fancy that the Dent du Midi would yield to a determined attack, but I should advise the ski-runner to tackle it from the south side, and not from Champéry. It is best attacked in winter from the Salanfe side, though this hardly comes into the category of Morgins excursions. The rocks of the Dent



Jaune have a southern aspect, and should go quite well in winter.

“But Morgins has other things to offer the visitor besides the best ski-ing in this part of the Alps. (My own private conviction is that the ski-ing at Morgins will take a lot of beating, go where you will.) There is an excellent skating and curling rink, beautifully placed, within full reach of the sun's attack. Mr. E. F. Benson thought very highly of the situation and upkeep of the rink. Then there is some very good tobogganing, and I believe an ice-run is to be built another winter. There are some glorious rambling walks. You can slip over to France in half an hour and take tea at Vonne; and in the evening there are all the amusements associated with life in winter-sports hotels. There is bridge for the sedate, and bumps for the elderly, and dances for children and Nature's children, of whom there were not a few to be found within a mile of Morgins. And there is—— but why add to this catalogue of good things? Those who have gone to Morgins once will return there, and those who have not will soon seek out this valley in the Savoy hills, and find a certain reward.

“ARNOLD LUNN.”

## CHAMPÉRY

Time presses, and to gain Champéry we must either pass over the Col de la Chavanette or else go back to Troistorrents and thence by the village of Val d'Illeiez. Like Villars, Champéry has experienced phenomenal development within the past few years. Although for long it has been patronized as a delightful summer resort, it has more than doubled its importance since its condition in winter was discovered to be anything but disagreeable. This, of course, has been the common experience of such places over almost the whole of Alpine Switzerland, and it appears to synchronize with the arrival of the ski from the north. The *luge* has done something, and so has the bobsleigh, towards Switzerland's new-found prosperity in winter; but the ski has contributed the most. Nor has the ski brought a revelation only to visitors; it has caused even the peasantry to take a new delight in their surroundings. At Champéry, for instance, one may see not alone the men and boys, but also the women and girls—wearing businesslike trousers—practising the art on the rapid snow-slopes.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is but yesterday that

<sup>1</sup> The old custom of wearing trousers for outdoor work by the women and girls of Champéry is not as usual now as it used to be when strangers were rare in the land. By their manner of regarding this sensible costume, visitors occasioned shyness; indeed, I believe that some years ago the parish priest advised the women not to wear trousers except in the dead season or upon the higher pastures.



CHAMBERY THE TANT DU MOI





the only outdoor winter distraction here was lugging down the village street and over the snow-covered pastures; whilst strangers were noticeable by their almost entire absence. It was in those quiet days at Champéry, and about Christmas-time, that was enacted one of the most impressive, haunting scenes that ever I have witnessed in the Alps. Two young men from Lausanne (if memory serves me, one was an American) started from Salvan to walk over the Col de Susanfe (about 7500 feet) to Champéry. As nothing more was heard from them, parties of guides from both Salvan and Champéry started out to find them. The search was ineffectual for several days, but at length the bodies of the poor fellows were found below the Pas d'Ancel. I shall never forget the sight, as the bodies, wrapped in sacking, were brought upon hand-sledges through the village after nightfall—the weird light of the torches upon the snow and the awed faces of the villagers; the sturdy band of guides, sad-visaged and weary; and the tense silence of it all—nothing but the scrunch of frozen snow and the bated prayers of women. Here was one of those strong, aery scenes which bring one face to face with the grim side of life in the Alps, and with the people's stanch devotion, however difficult, however daunting.

It may be that I look upon things Alpine with the

particular eye of the enthusiast for solitude; at any rate I think that Champéry, in spite of its great gaiety and *entrain* in winter and summer, is really its most radiant, loveliest self in spring and autumn. The lofty precipices of the Dent du Midi, the great rock-masses of the Dent de Bonaveau and the Dents Blanches are scarcely more bewitching or inspiring than when dressed in the first snows of autumn or the receding snows of spring. With what transporting shine and fire does the Dent du Midi reflect the autumn sunset; with what arresting energy do the Dents Blanches in spring rid themselves of their winter covering! Never can ravishing dreamland seem so real, so concrete, as when, amid autumn's soft, white, drifting mists, the snowy summits of the Dent du Midi glow clear coral-pink and crimson; never is the renewal of life proclaimed more loudly or impressively than when, beyond a calm foreground of glistening crocus and dainty soldanella, titanic avalanches hurl themselves upon the plateau of Barmaz.

Champéry and its surroundings are a nest of beauty-spots, in which flowers flash and sparkle like a myriad jewels. Unfortunately no space remains for detailing these many charms; even not to tell where the white rhododendron grows. There is, however, one spot that cannot pass without some notice: the exquisite *vallon* of Susanfe, by which climbers usually ascend

the Dent du Midi. Small as it is, it has all the sweet severity and wild attractiveness of true Alpine circumstance. Barmaz may possess a potent lure, so may the Col de Coux and the Porte du Soleil, but untamed, unspoilt Susanfe, though more difficult of access, is pre-eminently seductive; it is, in fact, the outstanding jewel in this neighbourhood of Champéry. Desolation is there, to be sure, in the hanging glacier and lingering snow, the gaunt rock precipices and tumbled boulders, the avalanche-swept turf, and cold-grey screes; but there, also, are the myriad flowers of brightest Alpine hues, the swift and babbling stream rushing to throw itself into the abyss below Bonaveau, the little blue-green icy lake bordered in part by walls of sunlit snow, and over all the glorious solitude—at times quite awesome.

Once upon a spotless autumn day I was sketching there belated spring flowers next the snow. All was still, save for the *peek-peek* of some small linnet-like mountain bird among the boulders by the glacier-stream, and the occasional shrill alarm-cry of marmots disturbed whilst collecting grass for making tight and snug their prospective winter quarters—sounds which, with their echoes, merely accentuated the prevailing silence. Then of a sudden the air was rent as if by a terrible explosion, and, looking up, I saw tons upon tons of sea-green ice split from the glacier and come roaring,



hurtling down over the rock-wall. The noise for a while was deafening. Then all once again was silent, with nothing to tell of the giant uproar but the amethyst-blue scar above the precipice. Never in my life have I felt solitude so acutely; never have I felt so insignificant and paltry. Not far off among the edelweiss, I knew, was a shepherd and his flock of three or four hundred sheep; but in the presence of this devastating force of "inert" nature, solitude and loneliness were mine in all their belittling power.

"I am just now, as you may see,  
Very unfit to put so strange a thought  
In an intelligible dress of words;  
But take it as my trust."



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